

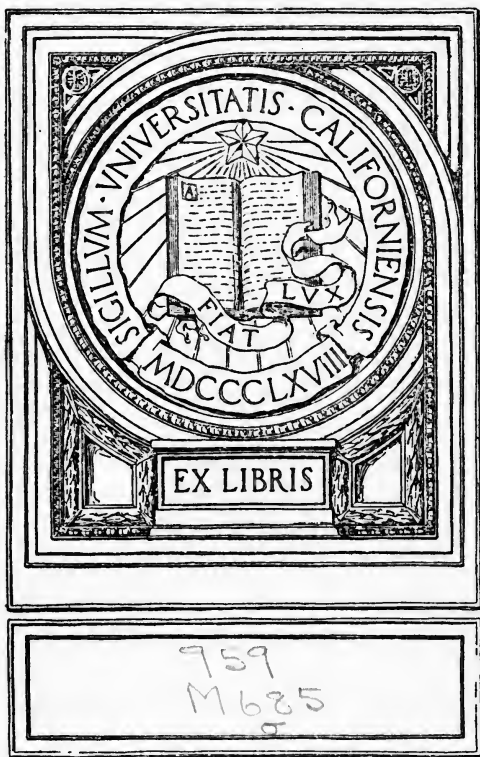
OUT of MIST

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Florence Kilpatrick Mixter



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OUT OF MIST

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By

Florence Kilpatrick Mixter

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OUT OF MIST
A SONNET SEQUENCE

I

PREMONITORY winds are at my door
And restive buds tap on my window-pane;
Through drifting clouds the hazy sunbeams pour
Their grateful presage of oncoming rain.
Within my room the April air is still;
No tremor stirs the roses at my side.
The shadows gather gently till they fill
The walls about me with a dusk world-wide.
And now grows faint the throbbing pulse of Spring.
Drenched buds sink down in elemental rest. . . .
Lo! spectral, through the stillness dark, you fling
The rainbow blossoms of the troubled west!
Each flower among them soon must fade and die,
Were they not all dream-wrought—thrown from the sky.

II

THESE hours are legendary; they shall pass
Like shadows of the April afternoon
That weave bright arabesques upon the grass
To fade on the dark dial of the moon. . . .
Long have I heard with mute, incredible wonder,
Your voice above Spring's low accompaniment.
Now, to the drum-beat of receding thunder,
You come—as though with your heart's turmoil spent.
Farewell to dreams! bright shadows unreturning
Across the lovely dial of the sun!
Over the day of their far-vistaed yearning
The twilight falls upon the play begun! . . .
What winds of Heaven now whisper on our lips? . . .
Pale in the sky the silent bow-moon dips.

III

WHY bid me say what you must know so well
That faltering speech of mine must but confuse?
What is there that my whispered words can tell
So truly as my every futile ruse?
Did not the smiling mask I wore so long
Prove but a banner of the war within?
Could studied silence smother all the song
That deafened me with its tumultuous din?
How did I seek to screen from out my sight
Those blinding rays from your compelling eyes!
And how I fought to quench the answering light
That from the glad fires of my soul would rise!
Ah! must you still look down and bid me speak?
What is it in my heart—or yours—you seek?

IV

BEAUTY be praised for this white hour when I
May tell my love! The storm has left no cloud
To mar the glory of the twilit sky,
And, radiant as the evening star, and proud,
I take your hand that soon shall lead me out
To undiscovered dawns! The road that lay
Before us had no turning; past all doubt
I follow now where you shall lead the way.
Ah, let the long years bring us what they will
Of paling stars or music that recedes!
Faith that is born tonight shall ever fill
The dusk—though unknown morrows teach new creeds.
For we have been as children—gay or sad
Together. But, together, somehow glad.

V

WHAT strange sweet gesture of remembering earth
Shall make this twilight spell forever ours
When, on momentous tides, it has re-birth
In fragrant miracle of wind-tossed flowers?
Perhaps a sudden onslaught of bright rain,
Like fury of the unleashed dreams of day,
Will beat again upon the window-pane,
In tune with flute notes calling us away.
Then, hearing the far-echoing thunder's roll—
Across whatever gulf of joy or tears—
We shall recall such treasure as the soul
May look upon once in a thousand years;
Seeing the garden that, enchanted, slept
Until Love came—dusk-shadowed and rain-swept.

VI

WHEN I had told my love, you slowly said,
“Go, dear! while strength is yours to turn away.”
And yet I could not think that hope was dead
That had not lived for even one short day.
At length you said, “Go now, before I mar
This holy hour with omens that your heart
Would vainly disavow—and from afar
Remember one white moment here apart.”
But, unafraid,—almost impatiently,
I heard you speak; nor even tried to guess
The import of this sudden mystery
That had no place amid such loveliness.
And when at last you turned and kissed my hair
Your sombre words melted like summer air.

VII

How glad I was! How light and swift my wings
That soared above the clouds, above the blue;
Above the memory of all earthly things
I seemed at last alone with God and you.
Did you fly with me? I shall never know
What mists obscured your vision; what faint cry
Came up to you from regions far below.
Ah! how I strove to make you see the sky
That trembled limitless before my sight—
Horizonless, unbounded, then at last
Melting into a universe of light!
Did you see aught of it before it passed? . . .
You do not answer, but, across your eyes,
Trail the dim mists of a lost Paradise.

VIII

THEN, as you turned and spoke a strange good-bye,
I seemed to hear within your voice a note
Of last decision, piercing the bright sky. . . .
Alone, there came a fear that clutched my throat
Until I could no longer see the light,
But needs must blindly creep back to your side
To find you safe.—Safe! and with eyes alight
Because your fantasies could so misguide
My trust that I should think the words you said
Were true; forgetting all in that belief
Save that I loved, and that you might be dead.
And you! You only smiled at my poor grief! . . .
Ah, was it triumph of the actor's rôle?
Or had I guessed aright your desperate soul?

IX

How shall I learn to live with this strange love
That has no place among the things I know?
For it is like a dream wherein I move
Upon a sea in whose strong undertow
I must succumb, save for some power of will
To battle with uncharted streams of death.
Ofttimes I struggle to recall that still
And brooding day when, with confiding breath,
I reached across the drifting sands to you
Whose strength was rock. But ah! how suddenly
That whirling cloud from out the unbroken blue
Swept us, unmindful, to the open sea,
Where, on relentless tides, moon-piloted,
We drift to shores of the forgotten dead.

X

WERE we so prodigal of joy that Fate
Grew tired of counting off the lovely hours
Whose sunlit vistas reached to Heaven? Too late
We saw the storm descending on our flowers
Long-gathered. I could only give one cry;
And then my soul was dumb and very still. . . .
But you, relentless of what now might die
If you should speak, proclaimed your angry will
With all the fierce magnificence of youth.
And as I heard and tried to steel my heart
We suddenly smiled! Ah, then in very truth
We saw a thousand sparkling blossoms start
Where one had been! I know not what we said
But only how the sunlight touched your head.

XI

WHAT place is there for me in your life's dream?
Is there a moment in a single day
When, at the far horizon's rim, I seem
A flashing sail upon the ocean's grey?
Comes there a time when dusk is hanging near,
With all the sky aflame in dying light,
That, of the racing cloud-shapes, I appear
The one swift-changing cloud of your delight?
And sometimes, when the dawn is shot with rose
And shimmering veils of mist obscure the sea,
Perhaps within your lonely heart there grows
A moment's all-engulfing need of me? . . .
Strange! Once I had no troubling wish to know.
But was that not a hundred years ago?

XII

ALL through the night I lie and think of you
Who leave me dumb with inarticulate pain
Where nightmare shadows pass in dim review
Down the dark corridors of my numb brain.
Now I grope blindly for the lover, dead
To my imagining; in wide-eyed fear
Travel the paths that once unswerving led
To him; but find him not; nor any tear
To blur the slow grey dawn. In vain I toss
From image upon image of this you
I do not know; then wonder if your loss
Of me could ever throb the whole night through?
No! Pitiless, you seem, still unaware
Of ghostly shapes that rise up everywhere.

XIII

WHAT words of sleeping consciousness beguile
Our hearts wherein was once no need for speech?
Better to part with one remembering smile
Than stare with empty eyes; while spirits reach,
Like mist-swept mountain peaks, to part the clouds
That hide them from the sky. . . . I would forget
The meaningless conflict; rend the smothering shrouds
Of pride; kill base distrust or vain regret
Rather than stifle thought of mine or yours;
Tear down the veils of mystery, and dare
To look for hate, or love that still endures
Beyond the tomb. . . . Ah! I would most beware
Of cruel artifice that now denies
The love we knew when truth spoke from our eyes!

XIV

How readily the dreaming mind forgives
The scar that glows relentlessly by day
And, in forgetfulness of pain, re-lives
The undimmed beauty of a far-off May.
Thus tenderly you came to me last night
And for one sleeping heart-beat held me near. . . .
One heart-beat whose far echo of delight
It seemed must ring from sphere to answering sphere.
Then suddenly I woke and you were gone
And once again the scar burned livid red.
How profitless my dream when with the dawn
I waken with a heart uncomforted
And, searching, know not if I grieve for hate
Or for a love that Hell cannot abate.

XV

SILENCE is bitter; yet what word of mine
Would reach you now? What miracle could break
The heavy doors that bitterly confine
Your spirit? What remembering smile could wake
The beauty that is dead? . . . All, all must fail
Only to bring us both to overthrow. . . .
No need to tell me that my words are pale
In your tense sight, and that my touch is slow
To heal your heart that would forever kill
The form it fashioned! Even my eyes allow
A quick defeat before your blinding will
And I at last am weaponless. Ah, now
Be swift in your unkindness. . . . Strike one blow
That shall release me. . . . With that kindness, go!

XVI

IN the pale languor of some sultry noon,
A brooding aeon since we said good-bye,
Would you, I wonder, on this day of June,
Unseal my letter with an ominous sigh?
Fearing the words therein might break the spell
Of moments we should never again know?
Fearing that I who once had loved so well
Might speak a language that you did not know?
Or rather, from these casual words of mine,
So unperturbed—save where the thought is broken—
Would you not read into each barren line
The love that, once at dusk, my lips had spoken;
And, dreaming, hold that memory to your heart
As you would me—were we not worlds apart?

XVII

If you sat here beside me, dear, tonight
We should not talk as we were wont to do;
Your coming would put every thought to flight
And it would be enough to smile at you!
Ah! we should watch the April sun go down
Beyond the long stretch of the river's flow,
And, turning, see the small lights of the town,
A-Kindle with our dreams of long ago.
And you perhaps would reach to take my hand—
For it is long, so long, since we have met—
And each has been in a grey, wintry land,
And for one shining hour we should forget! ,
Alone, I watch the mimic lamps burn bright.
For you are not beside me, dear, tonight.

XVIII

THINK not that I was slow to understand.
I have not loved you merely for a day. . . .
Your moods to me were countless grains of sand
That I have held and then seen slip away.
And I have loved you for so much that's wise;
For laughter; tenderness like summer rain;
For slowly wakened passion that defies
The short-lived beauty of its cruel reign.
And there are times I think I loved you best
When you seemed but a tired child of mine
Who came to me perplexed, or seeking rest
When shadows lengthened at the sun's decline.
But now that you are gone my eyes behold
Your flaming soul—before unguessed, untold.

XIX

TONIGHT no moon shines through the poplar trees;
The stars are pale before the coming storm.
And like a flash of sleeping memories
Swift lightning floods each cloud's awakening form.
The dark earth crouches underneath my feet,
And breath of clover scents the parching air;
Tonight, though you are far, our spirits meet
Across a chaos reaching everywhere. . . .
This is the hour when prophecies are rife
And for our pain the ancient gods atone
With respite of one winged hour of life
When love, defiant, rushes to its own.
This is the hour when lightning-riven skies
Sear with white flame the cold earth that denies.

XX

I DREAMED that, loving you again, I died,
And now my heart, once desolate and cold
As moonlit snow, in sudden wonder cried
“This is the land of our desire! Behold
The desert is aglow with jewelled light
And I see Beauty’s face mirrored afar
Upon the drifting sands!” . . . But darkest night
Was round about you and from your dim star
You answered “No! for now your love is done
And this is but mirage whose pale shapes drift
Across an empty sky.” . . . But as a nun
Perceives her God I had seen Beauty lift
Her lowered eyes that, from eternal May,
Assigned to us one last and lovely day.

XXI

WHY should I wonder that my song grows dull
And meaningless when to the minor key
Of my dead dreams I sing? Now in the lull
That ushers in this long feared day I see
No light to guide me, and I stand alone
With only silence, silence at my side.
Where late was such a sun as never shone
Dread darkness and the swift in-coming tide
Have found me on the quicksands, where I seem
To slip from you at every step. So long
Have I been calling you, at last, I dream
That you are come. . . . But it is my own song
I hear—and now I know its joyful cry
Is but the echo from a phantom sky.

XXII

THIS is more beauty than the soul can bear,
And I am faint with so much loveliness.
Not Eden itself would seem one half so fair
Were not my heart a thirsting wilderness.
Through terraced lights that hide among the trees
I wander to the moonlit lake below,
And, dazed and wondering, my spirit flees
Before a gladness I shall never know. . . .
Dim, rippling laughter from a still canoe;
Soft strains of music from the halls above;
Gay lights upon the mirrored lake—and you—
All mingled in a phantasy of love. . . .
Hush! Can it be your flute-call that I hear?
Now far away . . . Now ever drawing near . . .

XXIII

AN, once-beloved, is it you who come?
And is it I who give a pallid hand?
Beneath your silent gaze my eyes are dumb. . . .
We are two strangers in an alien land!
And who more courteous than we who dine
And, smiling, mingle with the other guests? . . .
“Good-night,” I hear you say. Your hand takes mine
That in your tightening clasp all-yielding rests.
Now, in a flash, I know that you are you,
Though still a shadow-shape but dimly seen;
Ghost of a flaming dream, come suddenly true;
Lover of old—and yet with altered mien. . . .
“Good-night,” I whisper—but the glad stars burn
With radiant promise of your swift return!

XXIV

At last we are alone and all is still
Save for the crackle of the great birch log
Whose silver strength is spent in flame to fill
Our hearts with light and laughter. The white fog
That hung so mournfully now slowly lifts
Above the western hills; dark hills where gold
Of dying sunset filters through the rifts,
In jewelled shapes my dreaming had foretold. . . .
And I, who ever wondered why the soul
Knows beauty to be more than all it seems,
Now find within your eyes its eager goal
And know your arms the destiny of dreams. . . .
And if life hold no other hour than this
I am content—remembering your kiss.

XXV

THERE is a calm that broods above the soul
As broods grey mist above an unquiet sea.
It is the calm that takes its ultimate toll
Out of the heart's last bitter agony.
Thus, high above the treachery of tears,
Above the night of all-enveloping gloom,
Above the desolation of long years,
I heard the quiet presage of your doom.
Then to my listening heart there suddenly came
The far-off echo of undying hours;
Down vistas of despair our love's white flame
Revealed one kingdom that was wholly ours. . . .
I seemed again in that enchanted land
Where we had dreamed at twilight, hand in hand.

XXVI

No bitterness shall ever drown this night
Wherein I came to know that we must part.
Beloved, like a bird in soaring flight,
You brought me all the passion of your heart.
Ah! it was Heaven just to feel you near,
Like holy stillness at the birth of dawn;
And it was your own soul you brought me, here
Where I still count the hours since you are gone.
Again I feel your lips upon my brow,
And hands that reach to clasp about your head
Fall heavy at my side; more heavy now
At living dawn than when they shall lie dead. . . .
But I who found you in that last good-bye
Shall hold one golden image till I die.

XXVII

IN memory I sit beside your bed
And see again the smile that lit your face;
Nor do the slow forgetful years erase
A syllable of those last words we said.
For, through my tears, seeing your brightness fled
Because of them, I plead with Heaven for grace
To make you smile once more, while with quick pace
I heard night passing that would leave you dead.
Swiftly I took your hand and held it tight,
Then told in words that choked me ever after
Some foolish trifling thing. And though the light
That came with your brave laugh was gone thereafter,
Yet, as a rocket fills the quiet night
With falling stars, I hear again your laughter.

XXVIII

WHERE shall I find you, gone across the mist
Of deep oblivion? Gestures that were you
Fade from my sight, yet hauntingly persist
In the slow-falling leaf. . . . The voice I knew
Is silent till I hear its overtones
In cadence of the wind. . . . Though Beauty cries
From every scarlet hill that now enthrones
Your spirit, no bewildering disguise
That you may wear shall lure me from the thrill
Of your swift smile. . . . Nor shall I ever tire,
Of seeking you—who once were and are still—
The appalling vision of my soul's desire.
For, out of mist, I shall at last discover
The unchanging you—dear strange immortal lover!

XXIX

HERE in the sanctuary of my dreams,
How many a bud shall flower when I am dead!
Ah, my beloved, even now it seems
As if they bent and swayed above my head.
What though the sceptics proved that death were real
And you were gone from me a million years
Yet would some restless daffodil reveal
The image God re-captured from my tears.
And you, with silent lips forever cold,
Might vainly seek my hand across the dark
But some old dream would flash; that day would hold
At dusk the promise of the rainbow's arc. . . .
There is not any grave where love may rest
Until illusion crumbles in earth's breast.

THE END

TRANSFIGURATION

SILENCE is everywhere; the night is long
With uncomplaining, and the far-off wrong
Of earth's unkindness is forgotten now.
Like glacier-carven rock the untroubled brow
Looms eloquent of secret strength that folds
The temple of the mind—a shrine that holds
Some hidden meaning, come at last to birth
Through tortuous pathways of relentless earth.
Now, though the soul has fled, yet in its flight
It has illumined in the caverned night
An image; burned the imprint of its wings
Into the clay, whence suddenly there springs
New form. . . . A form that neither life nor death
Can wholly claim; but, for one haunting breath,
Reflecting beauty, mute and lightning-shod,
Poised hesitant between the dust and God.

ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL

INTO the stillness of that vast retreat
I turn from off the hot and noisy street,
To rest a little from the deafening din,
To drink in beauty—not repent of sin.
Upon a shrunken crone who scrubs the floor
Rose-filtered sunbeams from a window pour
Transcendent splendor that might emanate
From the high Gothic arch of Heaven's gate.
Save for a kneeling silent form or two
I am alone with what is false or true;
Transfixed, I gaze upon the altar's gold
And wait for miracles it may unfold. . . .
The transept door swings wide and shows the sun
Upon the steps. There children laugh and run,
While two slip through the portals with glad rush,
Not sobered, only awed by that deep hush
Brooding within high dome and pillared walls
Like captive echoes of the light foot-falls.

Swiftly they pass through long and vaulted aisle
With eager eyes and faintly lingering smile,
To kneel before the candle-lighted shrine
Where Mother Mary lifts her face divine. . . .
Then, gaily, they go forth into the sun.
Lo! Mary smiles because they dance and run

THE SUMMONS

SHE met him in the little college town
Where he had gone to take a one year's course
In scientific farming. He was tall,
Broad-shouldered, and of sturdier, plainer stock
Than other men she knew; yet sensitive
Withal to her own fineness as perhaps
No other man had ever been. His eyes,
Direct and kind, had from the very first
Expressed his need of her; but when the year
Was over, he returned to his old home
Without a word of love, and she went west
To take up nursing.

Almost with relief
She found herself now free from what had been
A kind of bondage, and she wondered why
This silent man, with his great dog-like eyes,
Had so compelled her soul. Yet as the months

Grew into years, with only now and then
A note or Christmas card from him, she came
To miss him indefinably, and once,
When Christmas passed without a line, she wept.
Then, taking up his photograph, she tried
To look more deeply in his eyes than she
Had ever looked before; but no response
To her new mood was there, and when at last
His letter came, her heart was cold again.

* * * * *

Three years had passed since they had met, and he
Had lived meanwhile upon his father's farm
In south Vermont. She often pictured it;
A lonely spot, made lonelier still by fact
That he was close related to one man
Of every five in this wide valley, yet
Was alien to them all. His father's wish—
That this, his eldest son, should follow him—

Was law to such a nature as his own
And so he blindly toiled upon the farm
Where generations of his forebears slept.
His letter in her hand, she pictured now
The long, low farm-house, white against the green
Of undulating fields, whose shadowy gloom
First drew, and then repelled her joyous soul,
Just as his lonely strength had drawn, and then
Almost repelled her. Now at last she read
What he had written; read it stupidly
As if deferring comprehension while
Again she looked upon the summer noon-day
Of far-off fields—now wholly beautiful—
Where he, supreme in glory of his youth,
Awaited her. . . . Too soon the vision passed
And slowly, word by word, some meaning came
From those few lines of his. . . He told it with
His stern simplicity—how he had bought
A thrasher, hired it out, and then one day,

While trying to adjust a nut, the knife
Had caught his arm. . . .

She went to him at once,
Aware that no slight word of love had come
From him, but still with certainty such as
The gods might envy who, with laggard feet,
Shall bring vain gifts to intercept her pain.

DECEMBER AUGURY

STRANGELY enough, our conversation turned
Most unexpectedly to death, and we
Who but a moment since had laughed together
Suddenly were still. Somehow that night
The thought of death—which often, like a wedge
Between two minds, cuts off communication—
Brought us but closer. . . . Closer than the hour
And some vague arrogance in each of us
Had prophesied. We had not looked for this
But thought our loneliness secure. And now,
Too proud to show our souls, so lately clothed,
Bereft of their poor rags, we talked of death
As if it were a month's vacation. "Grief,"
You said, "a lasting grief, is quite beyond
Imagination. We experience shock
And feel within ourselves a deep revolt
Against some monstrous force—but actual loss

We scarcely know. There is a subtle beauty
Deep in the very awfulness of death
That carries with it its own anodyne.”
I half agreed with you. At least my words
Made but a faint protest; but far, far back
Within my brain I knew we lied! And yet
There, underneath the lamplight, the warm glow
Of living joy upon us, spoken words
Seemed to half lose their authenticity
And it was what we felt, not what we said,
That counted most.

Then, through the open door,
The sound of music came with muted voice
Of faint denial, and as if our two
Unbending souls were suddenly aware
That death had come to one of us, we saw
Just how the room would look with everything
The same, except that one would not be there.
But still we smiled and boasted of the way

We should forget; till all at once a gleam
Of sharp uncertainty and stabbing doubt
Flashed from your eyes to mine. And as we looked
And felt each other near, I tried to cry
“Impossible!” But no words came. The music
Ceased abruptly, and I do not know
What you were just about to say. Our eyes
Unsaid all that had gone before, impelled
By might of silence that shall some day speak,
Interpreting the emptiness of words
To one of us alone under the lamplight.

INVOCATION

TONIGHT in sleep there came to me
A dream where Christ walked on the sea
And, shipwrecked, I called out, to hear
His quiet answer "I am near."
But when the waves had risen high
I doubted—till I heard him cry
"Come take my hand, beloved one,
The long and lonely night is done.
Fear not! and you shall walk with me,
As Peter walked, upon the sea."

* * * * *

Who was it called? The night is slow
To answer, but, awake, I know
The clutching terror of the heart
That feels the weed-choked waters part
And, drowning, rears a Christ who stands
With dim-remembered outstretched hands. . .

Who knows if Peter's Christ is mine?

Like Peter, now, I ask a sign. . . .

If Christ still walks upon the sea—

* * * * *

How calm is dawn on Galilee!

THE DEAD

How quietly they sleep;
How tired they must have been
Who even now, in this wild storm,
Do not awaken.
What are they dreaming of
Who lie so still beneath the waving ivy?
Do they in their dreams, I wonder,
Hear the thunder's crash,
Or see the willows bend above their heads,
Or feel the passionate warm rain,
Like pent-up tears,
Upon their hearts? . . .

* * * * *

And you, dear timid one,
Who once so feared the lightning's flash—
Just now I hurried to pull down the shade
To shield your startled eyes,
And suddenly remembered
You were sleeping there
Among the dead.

TO EDWARD LIVINGSTON TRUDEAU

YOUR spirit passes, but a star is born
To burn steadfastly in the silent night
Where single purpose kindled into light
Your highest hopes, and living deeds adorn
Your memory. What though our hearts are torn
With loss? You welcomed death with eyes alight
Who long had fought with all a soldier's might,
And it were braver if we did not mourn.
Now sleep is yours, beneath the balsam hills
In whose strong healing breath, in whose repose,
We who have loved you feel the health that fills
Your soul. . . Great-hearted hills from which arose
Your dream, and whence your deathless spirit wills
That dream to rise eternal from the snows.

SANCTUARY

How is it faith outstrips the doubting word,
Leaving the skeptic brain in overthrow,
And, swift as arrow from the archer's bow,
Rises undimmed above the flight of bird?
Today the heavy mists of doubt are stirred
By distant currents—winds that softly blow
As if a promise given long ago
Were faintly whispered and as faintly heard.
I sometimes think that high above Earth's dome
Our hopes from turret to dream-turret soar
And, like gray pigeons, build their nests and mate.
There Beauty harbors them when they turn home
From their wide circling, and forevermore
Their sanctuary is inviolate.

RITUAL

KNEEELING, I worship at that holy shrine
Where Love returns when the Beloved is gone,
Where night, the sea, and one dark Gothic pine
Breathe their old covenants of golden dawn. . . .
Again I hear the reverberant, plaintive tides
Chanting their litanies upon the dune,
And dream I await you where the sea divides,
Cleft by the silver pathway of the moon. . . .
Though, when the eastern rim of heaven pales,
I shall arise alone, uncomforted,
Now, like a jewelled censer, night exhales
The incense of a dream forever dead,
And your rapt spirit, like an organ, pours
Its glad Hosannas on long-echoing shores.

THE DEATH OF AN ARTIST

“I TIRE of looking at the sea,” he said.

“The composition’s bad; it needs a tree
Within the line of vision where the red
Of sunset pales before immensity.

There’s too much water and there’s too much sky
Without a frame to hold them in their place,
And not enough of shore to rest the eye
Or any little thing to shatter space.

If I were painting it”—He suddenly smiled—
“You’d come upon it almost unaware.

Down avenues of green your soul, beguiled,
Would yield the sea a glance and find it fair.
How swiftly then the spirit would go free! . . .
I tire,” he said, “of looking at the sea.”

PROLOGUE

PAIN'T the sky midnight black! Hang the moon
In the highest tree!
Scatter the flowers of June
Irrecoverably!

Drop three stars in a fathomless pool!
Let a white cloud pass,
Soft as a breeze and cool,
Over the grass!

Leave open the rose-trellised gate
For mad Harlequin!
Hush! Draw the swift curtain of Fate—
Let the play begin!

WINTER LANDSCAPE

THE winter wind is whining
Across the furrowed snow;
A slender light is shining
Out from a silver bow.

Frozen beneath the moonlight,
The long road suddenly bends. . . .
I'll follow it some June night
And tell you where it ends!

THE WILD-CAT

It was midnight on the mountain side
When the wild-cat crossed the trail;
And I heard his padded foot-falls
And I saw his lashing tail.

And the red light gleaming from his eyes
Shadowed an unseen prey. . . .
But the cold moon covered the silence
Where a swift cry died away.

THE BRIDGE

How beautiful the bridge tonight
Across the wild ravine!
How fierce the lions, tense, alight
Beneath their marble sheen!

How golden under the lighted bridge
The rising torrent gleams!
How dark the purple iris ridge
Cooled by the freshet streams!

How like a wraith the cloud that flies!
How cold the moon that wanes!
Ah! when will the four lions rise
And toss their chiselled manes?

CHINESE EPITAPH

SHE was a Manchu lady. . . .

Near the tomb where she lies

Broods an ancient Buddha, with robes of jade and of coral
And curious lapis-blue eyes.

She was a wistful lady. . . .

When the west wind sighs

Inscrutable even as the terrible calm of Buddha
Her impassive disguise.

She was a Manchu lady. . . .

Azure the skies

And golden the tracery sealing the proud lips of Buddha
As the west wind dies.

A PRINT BY HOKUSAI

OF what avail
The tiny winds that call
To the indifferent sea? To ships a-sail
The twilight's silver pall
Whispers of night
Without one ripple stirred.
But on the shoals three fishermen in white
Are watching; they have heard. . . .
How still the ships!
So soon to feel the breath
Of winds that rush to meet the sea's cold lips
And fill the night with death!

THE CANDLE

THE coverlet lies like a shroud,
All smooth and without fold,
Oblivious of what it drapes—
A spirit numb with cold.

The arms are tense as if some weight,
Long held from off the heart,
Had slowly crushed the knotted hands
And forced their strength apart.

Disturb him not, who come to knock
With pity or dismay,
Nor ask who lit the candle
And softly stole away.

ALL SOULS' EVE

HARK! do you hear the choral dead?
Forgotten now their pride
Who on this night would have us know
They passed unsatisfied.

They shiver like the thin brown leaves
Upon a sapless tree,
Clinging with palsied, withered might
To their identity.

Their voices are the unearthly winds
That die before the dawn,
And each one has some tale to tell
And, having told, is gone.

* * * * *

Ah! you who come with sea-blue eyes—
And dead these hundred years—
Be satisfied! I hold the cup
Still brimming with your tears!

THE MARRIAGE OF THE SPRUCE

SAID the spruce to the new-fallen snow

“Be my wedding gown!”

But the little winds whispered “Lo!

We will shake the snow down!”

Said the spruce to the dancing rain

“Be my silver-shod feet!”

But the little winds, coming again,

Turned the rain to sleet.

Said the spruce to the icicles “You

Are my wedding veil.”

But the sun filtered, laughing, through

And the bride turned pale.

For the sun was the bridegroom who came

With a ring of gold.

And his love was a naked flame—

As the winds had foretold.

ESTRANGED

Is there some word
That you or I might say
To light the silence
With one golden ray?

We speak with lips
Cold or compassionate;
Their deeper meaning
Inarticulate.

Sometimes a flower
Or melody of flute
Almost reveals
Proud spirits that are mute.

Last night in sleep
The golden ray shone through;
Last night I dreamed. . . .
Ah, what are dreams to you!

TO A YOUNG GIRL

I HAD forgotten there were hearts so young
As yours, tonight,
Whose voice, now echoing with songs unsung,
Fills me with strange delight.

I had forgotten there were eyes so swift
Of April mirth,
Flashing as though with some invisible gift
From Heaven to Earth.

I had forgotten there were lips that pray,
Like a gray-winged dove,
For one more hour of laughter and of play
Before the holocaust of love.

THE OLDER WISDOM

FAIR head and dark, beside the deep cool brook,
Dream-light in their young eyes;
He reads to her from out an ancient book
Old wisdom for the wise.

And as she listens her rapt loveliness
Casts on the dusty page
A shadow, woven of a dream caress
In some dim golden age.

What if, between them, like a worshipped star,
Millions of miles away,
The older wisdom, flashing from afar
Could bid the dream-light stay!

SEPTEMBER

WHO is it calls

Through the sunlit wood today?

Is it you come back from where never a dead leaf falls

On the silent way?

Where the long road bends

Do you stand waiting for me?

If I call will you come by the trail that, winding, ends

Near this blood-red tree?

Down the years that are flown,

Beloved, I whisper your name! . . .

Ah! the red leaves drip from the tree and I stand alone

In a forest of flame.

ELEGY

THERE is one Spring,
One April of delight,
And all the rest is but remembering
One moon-lit night.

Weave round its spell
An elegy of song,
But never think the white hawthorn can dwell
With you for long.

It is so fair
And delicate a thing,
A sudden wind leaves blossoming twigs all bare
Of covering.

White petals fall,
Bewildered, at your feet,
And Spring makes of the whitest flower of all
A winding sheet.

IN MEMORY OF—

I THINK of you as one

Who often came

Close to the wooded shore to watch the sun

Go down in flame.

As one who dreamed

Until the night grew cold.

Heart of a child! For you the dark hills gleamed

With infinite gold.

As one who turned

Back to the shadowy room,

Your spirit's afterglow sole light that burned

Amid the gloom.

CRADLE SONG

THE window makes a frame for me
And all the stars that I can see
Are only three.

A little square of autumn night. . . .
Somewhere a moon, beyond my sight,
Pours silver light

Upon a hill where dark trees keep
A watch above Earth's heart, now deep
In lovely sleep.

A star for you, a star for me,
A star for love, and those bright three
Are all I see.

TO A CHILD

YOU are my silent laughter,
You are my unshed tears,
You are the elfin wonder
Of my ecstasy and fears.

You are my heart that dances,
You are my soul that leaps.
You have hidden the key of the lonely room
Where my troubled spirit sleeps.

CHANGELING

DEAR changeling, how I love your smile,
Fleet as a timid fawn,
It breaks upon me suddenly
And with a flash is gone.

It's hardly like a smile at all,
More like a blinding light
That darts across the starless sky—
A fire-fly of the night.

DRESSING UP

I SEE her coming down the winding stair
With trailing petticoat and feathered fan.
The ribbon binding up her golden hair
Is blue. She wears a mauve shawl from Japan.

No light of recognition in her eyes,
She greets me with a curtsy. As she nears,
Her every gesture, measured, slow, denies
The unbroken tyranny of her six years.

We play that she is hostess—I, her guest.
And now she asks me how I take my tea. . . .
O, tiny fledgeling, weary of the nest! . . .
“Two lumps and cream” I say—as brave as she.

LULLABY

COME sleep. Her heart's a wood-anemone.

Her thoughts are swallows flown
Across the dusk. Her hair's a willow tree

By the west wind blown.
Her eyes are pools where bubbles rise and break—
Dream-bubbles from the deep—
Her soul's a moth that flutters in their wake.

Come sleep. . . . Come sleep.

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